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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7426  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0613  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7600  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5780  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4201  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1685  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4208  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3304  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8202  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5773  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0494  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2519  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000007

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/02/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: MODERATE TAMIL POLITICIAN ASSASSINATED IN COLOMBO

REF: COLOMBO 1616

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. United National Party (UNP) member of parliament T. Maheswaran was shot and killed on January 1 while attending New Year's Day ceremonies at a Hindu temple in Colombo. Sri Lanka Police officials say that the suspected assailant, who they claim was working for the LTTE, was among those injured in the attack and is currently under police custody. Maheswaran was a frequent and harsh critic of the government, especially its human rights record. His security detail was reduced from 18 officers to 2 officers in late December, following his vote against the government's budget. On December 31, he publicly announced plans to reveal details of the involvement of security forces and paramilitaries in human rights abuses in Jaffna. This has led to widespread speculation that the government, rather than the LTTE, is responsible for his death. Maheswaran's assassination is the third killing of a moderate Tamil MP in just over two years, and does not bode well for the resolution of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. End Summary.

New Year's Day Attack  
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¶2. (U) United National Party (UNP) member of parliament T. Maheswaran was shot and killed on January 1 while attending New Year's Day ceremonies at a Hindu temple in Colombo. He was shot around 10am by an unidentified gunman at the Sri Ponnambala Vaneswara Hindu Kovil in the Kotahena area of Colombo. His bodyguard and 11 civilians were injured.

¶3. (U) Sri Lanka Police officials say that the suspected assailant was among the injured and is currently under police custody at Colombo National Hospital. The suspect is reportedly a resident of Jaffna who was temporarily staying at a lodging house in Wattala, just North of Colombo. Maheswaran's security officer, also injured in the attack, told local press that the suspect was one of Maheswaran's former security officers. The police say a "micro pistol" was found at the scene of the crime and say that such pistols are

commonly used by the LTTE. Defense Spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella announced that the President has ordered a full and impartial inquiry into the incident.

¶4. (C) Maheswaran, a businessman by profession, who some allege to have engaged in corruption, was elected to parliament from Jaffna in 2000. He was appointed Minister of Hindu Cultural Affairs in 2001. Maheswaran was elected to parliament from Colombo in 2004. He was married with two children.

#### Outspoken Government Critic

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¶5. (C) Maheswaran was a frequent and harsh critic of the government, especially its human rights record. He spoke out strongly against the round-up of Tamils following the November 2007 bombings in Colombo (reftel). He frequently voted against renewing the state of emergency that has been in effect since August 2005. Maheswaran also voted against the government's budget in December 2007, despite heavy government pressure to support it.

#### Security Detail Drastically Reduced

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¶6. (C) Maheswaran's security detail was reduced from 18 officers to 2 officers in late December. The UNP has charged that this reduction was a direct result of his vote against the budget proposals and that the government is therefore responsible for his death. Defense Spokesman Rambukwella has argued publicly that changes in Maheswaran's security detail

COLOMBO 00000007 002 OF 002

were based on the recommendations of the Threat Assessment Unit and that Maheswaran put himself in jeopardy by refusing to alter his daily routines. UNP contacts say the President, Prime Minister, and defense officials ignored pleas from Maheswaran to restore his security. Western People's Front MP Mano Ganesan, whose security detail was also drastically reduced last month, told us "the government of the day should take total responsibility for the assassination of Maheswaran" and that this incident illustrates the "very serious situation faced by human rights defenders" in Sri Lanka.

#### Planning to Reveal Government Misdeeds

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¶7. (C) Maheswaran appeared on the Shakthi TV talkshow "Minnel" on December 30, where he said he planned to release in parliament on January 8 a list of names of paramilitary and security force personnel in Jaffna who were involved in killings and abductions of civilians. On December 31, Maheswaran told Lanka e-News that a group of assassins from Colombo kills six civilians per day in Jaffna. He said these men are sent from Colombo for one-month tours and are stationed in Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) (a paramilitary group and political party headed by Douglas Devananda) camps guarded by the Sri Lanka Army. He reportedly planned to provide evidence of this to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he arrives in Sri Lanka in February. Speculation is rampant that the government, through the EPDP, silenced Maheswaran before any of this could happen. These accusations are strengthened by the fact that the killing took place in a high security zone and close to a police station.

#### SLMC Gets the Vacant Seat

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¶8. (C) Shafeek Rajabdeen, former provincial councilor and leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Colombo district team during the 2004 general election, has been appointed to fill the parliamentary seat vacated by Maheswaran. His appointment is based on an electoral pact

between the SLMC and UNP in 2004. (Note: Following the election, UNP candidates and those who contested with them were ranked according to the number of votes they received. Parliamentary seats are filled based on this list.) UNP contacts tell us that the appointment of Rajabdeen is a blow to the UNP. With the loss of Maheswaran, the UNP has just 5 more MPs than the JVP. Moreover, some UNP members are not confident that the SLMC will continue to support the UNP throughout the remaining sessions of parliament.

19. (C) COMMENT: Maheswaran's assassination is the third killing of a moderate Tamil MP in just over two years. Joseph Pararajasingham was killed in late 2005 and Nadaraja Raviraj was killed in late 2006. The systematic elimination of moderate Tamils does not bode well for the resolution of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict or the state of democracy here. Given the government's track record on the previous two cases, we do not expect to see an effective or transparent investigation into Maheswaran's killing. It is unclear whether the suspect in the hospital is truly the assailant or simply a convenient scapegoat. Embassy issued a statement on January 2 condemning the killing and urging the government to bring those responsible to justice without delay.

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